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"GERTRUDE OF WYOMING"

Sophisticated people have usually taken a certain interest in the country, and ever since the days of Theocritus, literature has reflected this interest in its glowing pictures of rustic life. Even in the most artificial days of the eighteenth century Pope in his "Pastorals" showed the grace, beauty, and happiness of the existence of shepherds. With the rise of the new feeling for romance in the same century, this attitude toward rural life became intensified, and writers vied with each other in painting it in the most glorious colors, making the country people models of virtue and their existence quite idyllic. Campbell's "Gertrude of Wyoming" offers us an example of just such primitivism.

"Gertrude," however, is not the first instance of primitivism in the work of Campbell. In a passage of "The Pleasures of Hope"¹ (1799), a lover imagines the life he will lead when he has married his sweetheart. They will dwell, not in the sumptuous splendor of some magnificent town house, but in

Some cottage-home, from towns and toil remote
Where love and lore may claim alternate hours,
With peace embosom'd in Idalian bowers!

In the vicinity, the young husband will wander musing upon the beauties of nature, and in the evening he and his devoted wife will enjoy the coziness of their little home, listening to the howling of the storm outside and beguiling the hours by reading choice bits of literature. This passage, though by no means an example of primitivism in every way, nevertheless indicates what Campbell considered a little earthly paradise, made up of love, literature, the beauties of nature, and a humble position in society.

"Gertrude of Wyoming," (1809) however, is a much more important example of primitivism and shows some additional elements. The village of Wyoming, situated in a natural paradise in Pennsylvania, is inhabited by various nationalities, which have come from Europe to find peace in the New World. The leading man in the community is the old Englishman

¹ II., 85-188.

Albert, who acts as judge of the people in patriarchal wise. His wife has died, leaving him alone to bring up their lovely child Gertrude. One day an Indian named Outalissi appears, bringing a white boy about Gertrude's own age. The child and its mother were saved from the hands of hostile savages, but having lost her husband in the general massacre, the lady died, begging the friendly red men to take her boy back to civilization. Albert is overjoyed to receive the lad because the latter's mother and grandfather were his friends. Since his mission is now accomplished, Outalissi departs, bidding an affectionate farewell to his young charge. The second canto presents a picture of the village of Wyoming some years later. In the mean time, changes have taken place, for young Waldegrave, the rescued boy, has returned to England, and Gertrude has grown to womanhood. One day as the lovely girl is reading Shakespeare in a sheltered nook in the forest, she is surprised by a handsome young stranger. At his request she conducts him to her father, and, after a short discourse, he overjoys them by revealing himself as Waldegrave. Since he and Gertrude were formerly devoted as children and time has not lessened their affection, they are married with great rejoicing. The third canto begins with an account of the wedded happiness of the young couple, who roam about joyfully in the beautiful woods near the village. Unfortunately this Arcadian life is interrupted by the outbreak of the American Revolution, which fills the country with the bustle of war. One evening an aged and withered Indian bursts into the village. Although no one knows him, he begins caressing Waldegrave affectionately, with the result that he is finally seen to be Outalissi. Rousing himself from his blissful reverie over his former charge, he announces that a hostile force of Indians is marching to sack Wyoming. Indeed no sooner has he said the words than the attack begins. The aged Albert and Gertude take refuge in a fort near by, while the battle rages outside with all the unearthly noises and unspeakable horrors of savage warfare, until the American forces finally drive off the Indians. In the moment of victory, however, a tragedy occurs, for both Gertrude and her father are shot by a skulking Indian marksman. Waldegrave clasps his mortally wounded wife to his bosom; they take an affectionate farewell; and

Gertrude expires in her husband's arms. In the midst of the general grief, old Outalissi in a war song exhorts Waldegrave to follow him that they may be revenged upon their enemies.

Many of the elements in "Gertrude" can be traced to their sources. Campbell's friend and biographer Beattie informs us that the poet began to sketch the work in the latter part of 1806. Now since Scott published his successful "Lay of the Last Minstrel" in 1805, we cannot help supposing that Campbell in attempting his first long tale in verse, was following in the footsteps of the greater man, who was his friend. Like most poets, he was inclined to write the sort of verse that was popular at the time, and occasionally his attempt came directly after the other man's success. Instead, however, of using Scott's meter, Campbell preferred to employ that of his favorite "Castle of Indolence," though he did not care to imitate its scattered archaisms.

Again, Campbell had a family interest in America. His father had resided some years in the country before marriage, and two of his brothers chose Virginia as their home. In fact at one time, the poet himself thought of migrating to the New World and entertained his imagination, as he tells us, with pleasant ideas of "mooring in the mouth of the Ohio." These facts naturally enough would incline him to treat an American subject. In addition, in his compilation "The Annals of Great Britain," he had just recently described the destruction of the beautiful village of Wyoming.

More important than any of these as a source was Chateaubriand's "Atala," which was published in 1801. In this, the aged and blind Indian chieftain Chactas relates to the European René the story of his youthful love for Atala. While he was a captive among hostile Indians, the girl fell in love with him, and loosing his bonds, accompanied him in his flight through the wilderness. A melancholy possessed her however, and she continually repulsed her lover's advances. At length, upon their arrival at a French mission, conducted by Father Aubry, Atala became mortally ill and confessed that she was gloomy because her mother, a Christian Indian, had devoted her to perpetual chastity. Father Aubry told her that the bishop of Quebec could absolve her from this unjust vow, but Atala replied that, in fear of violating her

chastity, she had taken poison, which was now producing its deadly effect. She died shortly afterward and was interred with the deepest sorrow by Chactas and Father Aubry.

Campbell borrowed various details from this French work. Most important of all, the name of his Indian *Outalissi* is that of Chactas' father, who is several times mentioned, but never appears in Chateaubriand. Neither this name nor the other points that are to be mentioned come from William Bartram's "Travels through North and South Carolina," from which Chateaubriand took several facts and which Campbell knew, if we may judge from a note appended to a later edition of "Gertrude." Bédier has carefully investigated Bartram and other sources of "Atala," and is obliged to confess that he does not know where the name *Outalissi* comes from.²

Again, apropos of the words "poured the lotus horn"³ in "Gertrude," Campbell has a footnote in the first edition: "From a flower shaped like a horn, which Chateaubriant (sic) presumes to be of the lotus kind, the Indians in their travels through the desert often find a draught of dew purer than any other water." Thus we have an actual mention of Chateaubriand in connection with "Gertrude." The passage which Campbell is referring to is almost certainly one in "Atala" where Chactas and his love are roaming through the wilderness and living upon any food they can get: "Quelquefois j'allois chercher parmi les roseaux une plante dont la fleur allongée en cornet contenoit un verre de la plus pure rosée."⁴ Here are to be found travelling Indians, the pure dew, and the horn-shaped flowers. To be sure, Chateaubriand does not call the plant a lotus, as Campbell says he does, but the change from a horn-shaped flower among the reeds to a lotus would not be difficult. Especially when we consider Campbell's careless scholarship, which is demonstrated in this very note in the undesirable spelling *Chateaubriant*, the change appears insignificant.

In "Gertrude," Campbell played ducks and drakes with zoölogy and incurred ridicule by putting tropical animals

² "Études Critiques," 266. (Article "Chateaubriand en Amérique: Vérité et Fiction") Paris, 1903.

³ I., stanza 25.

⁴ Chateaubriand, XVI., 60. All references to Chateaubriand are to the complete edition in twenty-eight volumes, Paris, 1826-1831.

in a temperate climate. When urged to change them years afterward, he refused because "they had been through so many editions." His probable source for the passage, the prologue to *"Atala,"* which describes the lower Mississippi River, is more or less incorrect, but Campbell makes the joke even better by innocently removing the poor tropical beasts to a still more northern climate. Though Chateaubriand's prologue is only a few pages long, it is a veritable menagerie and botanical garden combined. Among other things are mentioned flamingoes, buffaloes, squirrels, mocking birds, doves, humming birds, crocodiles, palm trees, and magnolias.⁵ All of these, with a magic wave of his pen, Campbell transports in a trice to the environs of Wyoming and scatters them wherever wanted through the pages of his poem.⁶ In only one case has Campbell taken his accompanying phrases from Chateaubriand; "And playful squirrel on his nut-grown tree" seems to reflect, "Des écureils noirs se jouent dans l'épaisseur des feuillages."

Furthermore, the same short prologue of *"Atala"* says that Chactas had been in France for a time contemplating the splendors of civilization, but had returned again to his native wilds. There in his blind old age, he was accompanied by a young girl as Oedipus had been by Antigone.⁷ From this passage Campbell very probably got the idea of a similar contrast in age and sex between Gertrude and her father, for the early death of the mother contributes nothing to the story. Besides, in the figure of Albert, a youth spent partly in civilized Europe is opposed to an old age passed in primitive America, just as it is in Chactas.

"Atala" abounds in references to Indian life, and from it Campbell may have taken the idea of introducing similar ones in *"Gertrude"* for the purpose of local color; in fact a few of his references, such as the Manitous⁸ or sagamité,⁹ may

⁵ All these occur in XVI., 21-23.

⁶ They are to be found as follows in *"Gertrude"*: flamingoes, I., stanza 3; buffaloes, II., 2; palm trees, II., 11; magnolias, II., 5; squirrels, I., 3; mocking birds, I., 3; doves, II., 12; humming birds, II., 12; crocodiles, I., 26.

⁷ Pp. 24-25.

⁸ *"Gertrude,"* I., stanza 17; Chateaubriand, XVI., 28.

⁹ *"Gertrude,"* I., 19; Chateaubriand, XVI, 32.

be taken bodily from Chateaubriand. Again, Campbell's description of a view toward the setting sun along the course of a river with the high banks or "ridges burning" in the evening light¹⁰ may have been suggested by the voyage of Chactas and Atala: "Le fleuve qui nous entraînait couloit entre de hautes falaises, au bout desquelles on apercevoit le soleil couchant."¹¹ Furthermore, Waldegrave's intention in case he found Gertrude and Albert dead on his return,-

I meant but o'er your tombs to weep a day,—

Unknown I meant to weep, unknown to pass away.¹²

sounds as if Campbell had remembered Chactas' mourning over Atala's grave: "Ayant ainsi vu le soleil se lever et se coucher sur ce lieu de douleur, le lendemain au premier cri de la cicogne, je me préparai à quitter la sépulture sacrée."¹³

In both tales, massacres take place, cutting short the lives of virtuous people. In the epilogue to "Atala," the author learns that Chactas and René both fell when the French destroyed the tribe of the Natchez,¹⁴ and that, at another time, Father Aubry and his colony of Indian converts were slaughtered with tortures by hostile savages.¹⁵ Finally, one might say with some possibility of being right that Campbell took from Chateaubriand the idea of naming his work after the heroine.¹⁶

Aside from the matter of details, there is a great similarity between the moods of the two works, and since two or three sure borrowings have shown that Campbell took suggestions from Chateaubriand, one cannot help supposing that he got some of his general spirit from the same source. Both works

¹⁰ II., stanza 2.

¹¹ Chateaubriand, XVI, 62.

¹² II., stanza 20.

¹³ Chateaubriand, XVI., 123.

¹⁴ Chateaubriand, XVI., 131, 132.

¹⁵ Chateaubriand, XVI., 132, 133.

¹⁶ After working out the resemblances between "Gertrude" and "Atala" independently, I discovered that H. M. Fitzgibbon in an edition of Campbell's poem (Oxford, 1891) had observed (p. 10, note) numerous similarities between the two in details. Of the minor points I have noticed, he remarks upon *Outalissi*, the animals and plants, and objects characteristic of Indian life. He totally neglects, however, to call attention to the resemblance in larger matters, such as tone or story, and to the resulting primitivism of "Gertrude."

are glorifications of the New World, where people live among the beauties of an unspoiled nature. The scenery in both is luxuriant, such as befits a paradise, though Chateaubriand is able to make it far more gorgeous than Campbell because of his greater descriptive power. He saturates his prologue with this spirit of rich and wild beauty and Campbell, according to his ability, does the same at the beginning of each canto of "Gertrude." Speaking of the Mississippi, Chateaubriand says: "Mais la grace est toujours unie à la magnificence dans les scènes de la nature: tandis que le courant du milieu entraîne vers la mer les cadavres des pins et des chênes, on voit sur les deux courants latéraux remonter, le long des rivages, des îles flottantes de pistia et de nénufar, dont les roses jaunes s'élèvent comme de petits pavillons."¹⁷ A similar attempt at richness is to be observed in Campbell:

But, high in amphitheatre above,
His arms the everlasting aloes threw:
Breathed but an air of heaven, and all the grove
As if instinct with living spirit grew,
Rolling its verdant gulfs of every hue.¹⁸

Nature plus the new world must equal extreme innocence of mankind, according to the Rousseauistic doctrine that man was naturally good and that all vices sprang from civilization. Accordingly in "Atala," we find father Aubry presiding over a colony of Indian Christians who are ideally virtuous. No laws are necessary. He has taught them only to love each other, and, as a result, though working separately, they willingly turn in all the fruits of their toil to a common store. In like manner, Wyoming is an Arcadia, and Albert takes the place of Father Aubry, acting as judge on the rare occasions when one is necessary. In fact, it looks as if Campbell might have taken the patriarchal position of Albert from Father Aubry.

In both works, the utopia is completed by a passionate love affair which the authors have made as romantic as possible. Both heroines are models of character. Atala will commit suicide rather than break her mother's vow. Gertrude has eyes,

That seemed to love what'er they looked upon.

¹⁷ XVI., 21.

¹⁸ II., stanza 10,

At the highest point of the two love affairs, the authors do their utmost to make the emotions as tense and the settings as rich as possible. In "Atala," the lovers are in the midst of deep, luxuriant forests, the night is dark, the woods are murmuring, and a thunder storm rumbles in the distance; all forms a suitable background for the powerful emotions within their breasts. In "Gertrude" in "over-arching groves in blossoms white," the marriage takes place, and, full of tender affection, the heroine hides her face on her husband's breast.

In addition, both writers, in picturing Indian life, paint it in far more ideal colors than it probably deserved. Chactas and his beloved Atala have the souls of most sensitive and poetic Europeans—of the romantic type of course—and, again, Atala is so heroic that rather than break her mother's vow, she commits suicide. In the same way, in "Gertrude," Outalissi, though a noble stoic of the woods, shows the tenderest affection for his young charge Waldegrave and is moved by the final tragedy to shed the only tears that ever stained his cheeks.

A similar catastrophe in the two works breaks up the Arcadia by taking the heroine and leaving the poor hero to wander forlorn. In both cases, yet greater happiness was in store for the lovers,—in "Atala," through their marriage, and in "Gertrude," through the birth of a child. The death of the heroine in each case is the occasion of a scene as full of pathos as lay in the author's power. Chateaubriand, the exponent of religiosity, takes the opportunity to glorify ecclesiastical ritual and devotional feeling, whereas Campbell, the sceptic, omits all mention of religion. The contrast between great happiness and great grief afforded by both tales, being an excellent example of the irony of fate, is dear to the romantic heart. Accordingly Chateaubriand revels in the gloom of the scene, and justifies Gautier in calling him the inventor of modern melancholy. Campbell brings out the tragedy and pathos at the close of his story, but, being more of a normal man than Chateaubriand, he cannot be said to gloat over it.

Beattie informs us¹⁹ that the original of Albert was Mr. Wynnell Mayow, a friend of the poet's, and a letter of Camp-

¹⁹ II., 78, in W. Beattie, "Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell," 3 vols., London, 1849. Campbell entrusted Beattie with the task of writing his life and gave him the necessary materials.

bell's²⁰ indicates that Miss M. W. Mayow, his daughter, was the model for Gertrude. Neither of these statements of course vitiates our conclusions about "Atala" and "Gertrude." From Chateaubriand's work, Campbell selected certain traits for his characters, and then completed the figures by taking suggestions from some of his friends' personalities.

Beattie has also printed²¹ two or three pages from a German novel by August Lafontaine, called "Barneck und Saldorf," which he thinks may have had some influence on "Gertrude." In the passage, a German relates how in childhood he lived with his parents not far from the Hudson River. The mother was of gentle birth, and hence her husband was particularly distressed at her toiling over hard work to which she was not accustomed. One day, a party of English and Indians appeared and killed the parents, but the child was saved by the arrival of some German soldiers. Thus ends the extract, which, we are told, is the only part of the novel "which bears the slightest resemblance to 'Gertrude of Wyoming.'" Since neither the Harvard nor the Boston Library possesses the book, I have had to rest content with the excerpt. The only proof that Beattie can give of Campbell's having read the story is that the poet had previously asked Scott to send him a list of German works that might well be translated. Whether Scott did it, whether "Barneck und Saldorf" was on the list, and whether Campbell read the tale are yet to be shown. At most, the German novel furnished the idea of a massacre of Europeans by Indians and the consequent breaking up of a devoted marriage, but it should be observed that the colony is very far from a utopia. Accordingly, though this novel could well be combined with the other sources as contributing part of the subject matter of "Gertrude," in default of surer proof that Campbell read it or of greater similarities between the works, it must be decidedly rejected.

Finally, a word must be said about the possibility of influence from the "Castle of Indolence" upon "Gertrude," an influence which has been occasionally assumed to exist by readers of Campbell. Except in meter, Thomson's poem is not similar to Campbell's; the plot and characters of "Gert-

²⁰ Beattie, II., 121.

²¹ III., 427 ff.

rude" are entirely different, there is no semi-burlesque element, and the Spenserian archaisms of Thomson are wholly wanting. In fact, the only point, besides meter, in which any influence might be discerned, is the treatment of nature. The castle of Indolence is situated in a dale in the midst of luxuriant scenery, producing a drowsiness upon beholders.²² Similarly, the landscape about Wyoming is characterized by a rich beauty, but, being unsuitable to the story, the sleepy effect is omitted. Furthermore, both the castle of Indolence and Albert's home are in valleys—not a striking similarity—and there is one verbal resemblance: in Thomson the reader learns that in the vicinity "stock-doves plain"²³ (a verb), and in Campbell, he is told about "stock-doves' plaining."²⁴ In view of the fact that Campbell was extremely fond of the "Castle of Indolence," it is very likely that he was confirmed by it in a desire to make the setting of "Gertrude" as rich as possible. Nevertheless, since the poet probably derived his ideas of the innocence of the New World, the noble life of Indians, and an idyllic but tragic love affair from Chateaubriand, one is inclined to believe that the luxuriance of nature in "Gertrude" is mostly due to the same author, particularly because Chateaubriand exemplifies the quality far more strongly than Thomson.

It is interesting but not very profitable to speculate in what order the various influences on "Gertrude" came into play. Presumably, Campbell began with the desire to write another long poem besides "The Pleasures of Hope." Since a didactic poem would be rather old fashioned, he determined to try the tale in verse, a genre which Scott had just shown was popular, and in order not to follow his brother poet too closely, Campbell adopted another meter—that of "The Castle of Indolence" and its successors. His family interest in America and the mention of Wyoming in his "Annals" may then have led Campbell to choose as his subject the massacre in this village, with the result that he went for details to "Atala," another book on America. More probably, however, he had already read "Atala," which imprinted itself especially deeply on

²² I., stanzas 2-5.

²³ I., stanza 4.

²⁴ II., stanza 12.

his mind because of his interest in America. When he first thought of writing a tale in verse, he then inclined to a primitivistic love plot like Chateaubriand's, and soon remembered the Wyoming massacre as a suitable catastrophe for the story. Finally he filled out the characters of Albert and Gertrude from his friends, the Mayows.

The primitivism of "Gertrude" is utterly unreal like that of its prototype "Atala." Since the scenes of both were far removed from the haunts of sophisticated European readers, the authors thought they might give free rein to their imaginations, and consequently constructed fairy lands, charming to be sure, but, when compared with reality, as insecure as castles imagined in the clouds.

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